

# WE ARE ONE

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

"This shall be the law of the metzora (one afflicted with tzara'as, a spiritual disease similar in appearance to leprosy) on the day of his purification..." (Vayikra/Leviticus 14:2) The Torah continues its narrative of the tzara'as afflictions of a person's body, his garments, and his home and focuses on the purification process following the disappearance of the affliction and the destruction of afflicted properties that do not become cured. We today do not merit having tzara'as as a reminder to desist from lashon hara (slandering speech and other forms of verbal abuse) and other derisive behaviors toward our fellow Jew, but we do still suffer the consequences of our actions.

The Talmud (Tractate Yoma 9b) notes that the First Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem) was destroyed because the Jews violated the cardinal three sins of idolatry, immorality and bloodshed. But why, asks the Talmud, if the Jews of the Second Bais HaMikdash toiled in Torah study, mitzvos (fulfillment of Divine commands) and chesed (kind deeds) was that Temple destroyed? The Talmud explains that the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash and the subsequent exile - through which we continue to suffer - came because of the senseless hatred among them. This senseless hatred was manifest in acts of slander and other forms of demeaning speech, miserliness and viewing the acts of their fellow Jews negatively. The Jerusalem Talmud (Tractate Yoma 1:1) advises us that any generation in which the Bais HaMikdash is not rebuilt is considered to have destroyed it. In short, our 2000 year exile is, in some measure, a product of our own deeds. But these deeds impact much more than our lives in this world. Orchos Tzaddikim (classic Mussar (ethics) text of unknown authorship, originally written in Yiddish in the early sixteenth century, first published in Hebrew in 1582), in his discussion of the trait of humility (chapter 2) describes the discovery that will be made by the one about whom slander was said when he is judged after his death. He will witness countless mitzvos credited to him that he never performed. Similarly, he who uttered the defaming words will find at his judgment countless sins for which he is debited, all for acts he never committed. Orchos Tzaddikim explains that this is Divine settling of accounts that takes place in the Afterlife: the speaker of lashon hara loses credit for his mitzvos and assumes responsibility for his victim's misdeeds.

How do we rid ourselves of this awful scourge?

Michtav Me'Eliyahu (collected writings and discourses of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954) of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement) expounds that lashon hara is the result of division amongst people by people promoting themselves

at the expense of others, an exercise to which the listener who accepts the derogatory report is an accessory. But with mutual brotherhood and unity - on the part of the speaker, listener and subject - a sense of oneness is achieved, such that all Jews are akin to a single body. Self-aggrandizement becomes impossible, just as a person does not promote the interests of his head over the needs of his feet, because he appreciates that they all part of himself, each serving an essential role in the human mission. Rabbi Dessler draws attention to the resolution of the first case of tzara'as used to bring repentance for lashon hara, when Miriam spoke negatively about her brother, Moshe. G-d commands, "You three, go out to the Tent of Meeting." (Bamidbar/Numbers 12:4) Rashi explains that G-d spoke to all three of them independently but simultaneously - an impossible act for a human - to indicate that these three individuals had to come together, in body and in heart, to correct that root cause that allowed the lashon hara to be spoken. Without this unification, Moshe's prayers for his sister's recovery would have been for naught.

The season of Pesach is a time of renewal. The physical manifestation of this essence is the rebirth of spring. The original Pesach of 3315 years ago was a spiritual result of the fundamental nature of this time, and our Sages tell us the future Messianic redemption will also come at this time. The ultimate purpose of the past redemption was the acceptance of the Torah at Sinai 50 days later, at which time the encampment of the Jewish nation is referred to in the singular, not the plural (Shemos/Exodus 19:2). Rashi explains the peculiar language indicates that they were as one person with one heart. As we strive and pray for our ultimate redemption, we know that the power to bring it is in our hands, when we restore our unity of body and heart.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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